



He Don't Wait to See What's Goin' to Happen to Him.

other kind of stiff; but after that they tended strictly to business. Then down at one end of the dinin' room I spots a big sign readin', "SILENCE, PLEASE!"

The waitresses was all dressed like nurses too, and goes floatin' around silent but busy. After we'd been there three or four minutes and nothing happened our way in the shape of food, I begins rubberin' around to see what the others was gettin'. Is soup your guess? Then come again! It looked like pill time. Uh-huh! The wrinkled old dame on my right was handed a bottle of little pink ones, and counts out three very careful on the tablecloth. I was lookin' for her to pass 'em to me next; but she don't. The red-faced, bald-headed gent just beyond gets one white wafer the size of a quarter and tucks it away on the back of his tongue, rollin' his eyes thoughtful at the ceilin'. A stunnin' lookin' young woman opposite drops yellow stuff out of a slim bottle into her water glass and stirs it vigorous.

"Gee!" thinks I. "Have I been rung in on a dope fest, and me without even a mint jujube to swallow, just to be in the swim?"

And about then Carrie in the white cap leans over my shoulder and demands businesslike, "Your diet list, please."

"Hey?" says I, whisperin' husky.

"Haven't you been given your list yet?" says she.

"No," says I. "Just come. Him too," and I jerks my thumb at Talcott.

"Oh!" says she. "Then you're on the milk and zwieback," and off she glides.

"Hear that?" says I, nudgin' Hub. "All we get to-night is—"

BUT he ain't listenin'. He's got his eyes glued on a dried up little old gent opposite, one that I'd noticed hobblin' in with a couple of canes. He's a thin, sour lookin' duck, with bristly white eyebrows. In front of him is a round cardboard can that would hold about a quart and is labeled "Tagi-Tagi." It's white, shiny stuff, like powdered mica, and he's spoonin' it into a cup of hot water. He'd just dumped in a big dose and was mixin' it up, when what does Hub Talcott do but go off with a bang.

"Haw, haw!" roars Hub, openin' the humor cutout wide; and in that big, quiet room it had about the same effect as turnin' loose a Harry Lauder record at a funeral. You could hear the echo of it go bumpin' and caromin' up and down, and every last one of them drug destroyers drops what they're doin' and begins stretchin' their necks our way. We sure had the spotlight on us. Old Bushy Brows glares savage, the bald-headed gent gasps so hard he gets the wafer down his windpipe and proceeds to choke, and all over the room a buzz of indignant remarks breaks loose that shatters what's left of a once peaceful scene.

Meanwhile Hub Talcott has clapped his hand over his mouth and turned the color of a hall carpet. I expect I was blushin' some myself; so I turns and stares reprovin' at poor Hub. He has his chin down and his eyes on his plate, sufferin' agonies, I expect. If he'd only kept that pose, the thing might have blown over; but he don't. No, he has to take another peek across the table, just as old Sour Face is indulgin' in his first sip of hot Tagi-Tagi. Whatever it was, it must have been fierce tastin' stuff, judgin' by his map contortions; so I don't know as you can blame Hub so much.

"Haw, haw!" he explodes once more, fit to raise the roof.

Well, that was his finish. He don't wait to see what's goin' to happen to him for a second offense, or whether

they'll call out the militia. He just slides out of his chair and beats it for the door, with me only two jumps behind. There was three nurses and two young doctors trailin' after us as we hit the stairs; but I waves 'em back menacin', slips into No. 38 behind Talcott, and bolts the door after us. He collapses on a chair with his face in his hands and his shoulders heavin'. I sits down to wait until the spasm is over.

FOR the love of Mike," says I, after a minute or so, "what did you do that for?"

"I—I couldn't help it," says he. "It—it was all so—so absurd. Did you see that can? Tagi-Tagi! Oh, my!" And Hub rocks back and forth mirthful.

"Yes, I admit it was some comic," says I; "but I didn't see any call to bray over it. Couldn't you hold that in?"

"No," says he. "That's my trouble. I never used to be like this. You—you may find it hard to believe, but naturally I'm very quiet. Of course, I generally see the funny side of things; but I'm not in the habit of making such a spectacle of myself. Since I've been this way, though, I've been doing things like that. It's awful, isn't it?"

"Does sound kind of raw," says I, "especially here at Whisperin' Pines. Nerves, eh? What do you think brought it on?"

"I don't know," says he, sighin'. Then he adds quick, "Yes, I do too. And I've been wanting to talk to someone about it for weeks. It's—it's this society training I've been going through."

"Which?" says I, puzzled.

"At Aunt's," says he. "Learning how to get through those long dinners, and those horrible teas and receptions. Oh, it's no use—I can never do it right!"

Which gives me a new sidelight on Talcott's case. "Little new to that sort of thing, eh?" says I. "Where do you hail from?"

"Chinook, Oregon," says he.

"Cute name," says I, "Chinook. In business out there, were you?"

"Fruit," says he. "I've nearly a whole quarter-section of valley land, most of it set out in apples, pears, and plums. It's on the west slope of the foothills, with the mountains in sight beyond. I can see every foot of it from the veranda of my bungalow. My orchards will be well in bud by now. In a week they'll be in blossom. Ever see a big fruit orchard in full bloom, by moonlight?"

I shakes my head. He sighs once more, deep.

"They write me there'll be a fine set of bloom this spring," says he. "The four-year grafts are coming in too. I had figured on their bearing a thousand bushels this season. We are developing a steady London market. Getting our apples into Paris, Berlin, even St. Petersburg too. Put up two new packing sheds during the winter. And I—well, here I am!"

"Think the fruit raisin' business suits you better, do you?" I suggests.

"I should hope so!" says he. "I was raised in it, trained for it. You see, Father started out there twenty years ago when he broke with Uncle Ridley. He was doing fairly well too, when the rheumatism got to his heart and I had to take charge. Eighteen I was; but I knew apple raising—not the whole of it. I've never stopped studying, experimenting. I suppose I've had some luck too. Father paid four dollars an acre for his land. My orchards are worth a thousand times that today. I've done a few things,—the Talcott sprayer, new packing methods, originated two apple varieties. I don't mean to boast. I just wanted you to know that

out there I'm not counted such a muttonhead. But on here—" he shrugs his shoulder and groans.

"Then you ain't a star performer yet at these tea fights and sandwich combats?" I asks.

"I'm the prize jackass of New York society," says he. "I didn't want to try it; but my aunt urged so hard, and promised so much, that I came on and tackled the proposition. Oh, I've been through the whole game,—table talk, drawing room stunts, dancing lessons, bridge lessons, French. You know, we don't live so rough out on the Slope, even if we don't have time to be manicured every day and keep up with all the new dances; but there are so many foolish frills to life here. And it was trying to keep track of all those silly little parlor tricks that got my nerve. I'd get fussed easy. That's what happened the day I—well, at Mrs. Ogden Bruce's."

"When you mingled with the goldfish?" says I.

"Yes," says he, swallowin' hard.

"You see, it was a crush. I'd pushed my way in, shaken hands with the wrong people, forgot to speak to the right ones, got my tongue tangled trying to reply to one of those smart young women, and then drifted into a room where the flunkies were handing out things to eat and drink. It all seemed so fearfully silly! I was watching a fat old woman trying to get a spoonful of biscuit tortoni into her mouth when someone jogged her elbow—and plump the spoon went into her ear. That was my first public hee-haw. And when folks stared at me I got so nervous I stepped on someone's dress, and

the next thing I knew I had backed into that confounded pool! I'm glad of one thing, though, that tall Frisbie girl saw me."

"Just how does that help?" says I.

"Why, I hope it's all off between us," says he. "It was Aunt's plan, you know. She had arranged the whole thing. I don't know just how far she's gone; but I know they were planning luncheons and dinners for us. And hanged if I'm going that length, not even for a million!"

"That's the size of the purse, is it?" says I.

"Yes," says he; "providing I do all she wants me to do. And I tried my best until it came to Miss Frisbie. But that's too much; for I just can't give up—" Here he breaks off short and bites his lip.

"Never mind me," says I. "What's her first name?"

"Stella," says he. "And, say, in the whole of New York there isn't a girl that's worth while mentioning in the same breath with her."

"You're the expert on that," says I. "Someone back in Chinook, is she?"

"She came down from Seattle to be my secretary," says he. "She's there now, running things for me. We weren't exactly engaged when I left, but—"

"I get you," says I. "Writes regular, does she?"

"Every Sunday and Wednesday," says he.

"Huh!" says I. "And in case you renig on Miss Frisbie, or Aunt's next entry, you're liable to have your name sponged off the will?"

"She'd do it in a minute," says he.

"Well, Hubby, my boy," says I, "a million's a bunch of money, and your case is too complicated for me. Guess you'll have to thresh that out all by your lonesome. But you'll be in better shape to tackle it after you've had a week or so here among the—"

"A week!" he breaks in. "Why, I couldn't! They're too funny, just as these society people are too funny. And none of them know it. No, no! I can't stand it. I've tried; but it's no use. They all think I'm a fool, and I think the same of them. So what's the use? I'm going back. I must! A week or two in my orchards will set me straight. I can laugh there if I want to. And Stella sees things as I do. She can laugh with me. I'm going, I tell you, first thing in the morning!"

"In that case," says I, "I might's well skirmish for the kitchen and see if we can't have some real food brought up here, without pills on the side."

Yes, after I'd hinted how sad it was that my friend Talcott should go off his nut so sudden, but how he gen'rally came out of these spells after a good meal—well, the tray was piled so high I could hardly get it through the door. They had the wagon ready to take us to the first mornin' train too, and all the stay Hub Talcott made in New York was while he was waitin' for a Chicago express to pull out. He left me to deliver his farewell address to Fifth-ave.

COURSE it takes sometime to get the simple facts through Pinckney's head; though I stated 'em clear and plain.

"What!" says he. "Hub not at the restorium, you say! But why not? What was the matter?"

"Case of ingrowin' humor that he's lugged back to Chinook—and Stella," says I. "He's quit, chucked the whole proposition."

"But—but how could he?" gasps Pinckney. "His position, his prospects, all that! I don't understand."

"No more could Hub understand you and your kind, Pinckney," says I. "Only it was worse on him. He didn't dare to laugh."